

ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	USNW-00
	DODE-00	DS-00	EB-00	OIGO-00	UTED-00	VC-00	H-00
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	DCP-00	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OIC-00	NIMA-00	PA-00	PER-00	GIWI-00	PRS-00
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM BC SAN CKGR
SUBJECT: A VISIT TO GHANZI DISTRICT: HAPPINESS IS
SOMEWHERE ELSE

¶1. (U) Summary: Ambassador Huggins visited Botswana's western town of Ghanzi and the San/Basarwa relocation settlement of New Xade on March 10-11. Rural poverty, severe dependence on government assistance, lack of income-generating opportunities, despair among youth, and the underperformance of the parastatal Botswana Meat Commission (BMC) were identified by interlocutors as dominant issues in the district. Officials proclaimed the advantages of the relocation of the San/Basarwa out of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve into villages. NGOs emphasized the forcible aspect of the exercise and the psychological trauma and cultural disorientation it had produced. The GOB, as revealed in a subsequent meeting with the MFA PermSec, views the San as a group which, like other ethnic minorities in Botswana, should use education to move forward. End summary.

Into the Frontier Zone: Ghanzi District

2.(U) It is a truism that practically all of southern Africa is a frontier. Botswana's Ghanzi District is vintage: containing the vast Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) where the mode of hunting and gathering still provides a livelihood for remnants of various Khoi/San-speaking groups, however diminished. BaKgalagadi peoples, herders and agriculturalists, live there, as do Herero-speakers, refugees from the 1905 war of extermination in then-German Southwest Africa. Afrikaans-speaking groups, with expertise in ranching, moved in around 1900, taking advantage of Ghanzi's rangelands and its hydrogeology, where vast aquifers can be tapped at shallow depth under limestone ridges.

¶3. (U) Ghanzi District's major source of income is the sale of cattle to the parastatal Botswana Meat Commission, located in Lobatse, some 600 miles to the southeast. Transport has become more efficient in the past few years, with the excellently paved Trans Kalahari Highway running between Lobatse and Ghanzi, and on into Namibia. Ghanzi town has grown over the past five years, and district officials mentioned the scarcity of urban plots and available land in the immediate area of town. Ghanzi town, as district capital, has government offices, staff housing, and facilities, as well as the requisite hospital and schools. Apart from that, it functions as the service center for the outlying ranches and their population. No industry is located there.

Problems, Problems: Any Opportunities?

¶4. (U) Ambassador Huggins and EmbOffs met with district officials over lunch in Ghanzi on March 10. Predictably, conversation turned to a list of perceived problems. One was the low prices the Botswana Meat Commission (BMC) pays for slaughtered cattle. Many considered that the time had come to end the BMC monopoly and open the trade to competition. Various officials lamented the lack of jobs for young people and stated alcohol abuse was a major problem. Ambassador Huggins noted that the Trans Kalahari Highway running up to Ghanzi should provide an economic stimulus, and urged the district planners to poise themselves to take advantage of this, but the response

was low-key. The Remote Area Dwellers (RAD) program officer complained that the services provided by the GOB were not fully appreciated by "these people."

How are you going to keep them on the farm?

15. (U) After lunch, Ambassador Huggins visited a training site just outside of town, run by the NGO Permaculture Trust, which is actively engaged in several villages bordering the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) to assist the population in making the transition from hunting and gathering easier for those in the relocation villages. They have begun communal gardens, and they have a demonstration vegetable garden at the training site that utilizes drip irrigation, installed with a grant from the Ambassador's Self-Help Fund. We learned that Permaculture Trust is active in the relocation village of New Xade, where it has also built some sixty houses.

16. (U) The Permaculture staff was highly critical of the GOB resettlement policy, noting that people had been dumped in villages like New Xade, without being

provided with sufficient shelter, support, or even food, and decried the idea as ludicrous that the people could transform themselves into industrious villagers, craft-sellers, while seventy miles away from a main road. They emphasized the arbitrariness, the lack of consultation, and the lack of transparency in GOB decision-making when it came to the treatment of the San/Basarwa peoples in the district.

A Recipe for Discontent: Discrimination, not Dialogue

17. (U) Ambassador Huggins' next meeting, with two NGO leaders, Matambo Ngakaeja of the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities of Southern Africa (WIMSA) and with Roy Sesana, of the First People of the Kalahari (FPK), proved informative. Both groups represent the interests of the San/Basarwa people of the district, and specifically of those who were forcibly moved out of the CKGR in January 2002. At present, the Botswana High Court case brought in July 2004 by the First People of the Kalahari v. GOB, is in recess. We asked Ngakaeja and Sesana about the likely outcome. They were skeptical but made the point that the GOB is by attrition attempting to wear down the financial resources of the FPK. Both considered "eviction" as a more accurate description of what took place than the GOB usage: "relocation." Neither believed that plans for mining were the reason that the San/Basarwa groups were removed.

18. (U) Sesana explained that he had visited the United States in 2004 because he wanted to learn, especially from Native Americans' experience, how to obtain the ear of the government. He stated that First People of the Kalahari accepted the support of Survival International, the London-based NGO, although he did not agree necessarily with its strategies nor with its campaign to boycott Botswana diamonds. He thought it only hardened attitudes on both sides. But he said the alliance was a last resort.

19. (U) The GOB had consistently declined to enter into dialogue on the question of the San/Basarwa and their right of access to the CKGR. He and Ngakaeja were mystified why the relocation took place. Sesana said that the GOB will point to large schools and shiny new buildings in the relocation villages as tokens of their benevolent intent, but, he asked, "Where are the Basarwa professionals that the educational system is supposed to be turning out?" Ambassador Huggins asked what alternative there would be in Sesana's view, and he mentioned that ecotourism, involving the San/Basarwa themselves, would be an option. Gradually, the San/Basarwa would then successfully be integrated into mainstream society. At present, he stated, people's rights were being violated, and they had been torn away from familiar foods, medicinal plants, environment, and religious ties with the land. The consequence was death in some cases, and enormous suffering in other cases. People mourned that they could not pass on their culture to their children.

10. (U) Ambassador Huggins asked how many persons had been removed from the CKGR, and how many had returned. In all Ngakaeja and Sesana estimated some 2,500 had been evicted; some 250 persons, mostly older San/Basarwa, were still in the CKGR, and perhaps another 250 had returned over the past two years from the relocation villages. Ngakaeja stated that

San/Basarwa are systematically being discriminated against by the GOB, which moves them away from wherever there might be an income-generating opportunity.

¶11. (U) He cited the case of the Tsodilo Hills, renowned for its rock paintings, where San/Basarwa were moved five miles away, with the consequence that Hambukushu people now served as guides and craft sellers there. He cited the Janatarka area in Central District, where San/Basarwa were being forced to move, as well as the Trans-Frontier Park, between Botswana and Namibia, where San/Basarwa interests were sidelined. "The land use system of the San is simply not recognized by the government," he said, "and the government is unwilling to enter into any discussion on this or other matters having to do with the San/Basarwa."

Prospects for Unity: the view from the BNF

¶12. (SBU) In a meeting with two opposition party local

councilors (the Botswana National Front-BNF), Mr. Douglas Lemme and youthful Mr. Motsamai Motsamai, the major constraint to BNF gains was identified as lack of financing. Motsamai was clear, and contemptuous: the way to win votes in San/Basarwa areas was through tobacco, food, and clothes. "They believe only in hand-outs," he said. When asked about prospects for 2009, and cooperation between the opposition parties, the BNF and the Botswana Congress Party (BCP), Motsamai's first reaction was, "The BCP has learned its lesson; they will come to us."

¶13. (U) Emboffs pointed out that such a stance might not be the most diplomatic, and he agreed, saying it would be worked out at national level. The councilors gave the BDP government credit for its approach to the HIV/AIDS scourge and would not change it if the BNF came to power. They passionately disagreed, however, with the BDP silence on Zimbabwe's crisis and expressed their frustration with the national and regional paralysis on this issue. They also wanted the monopoly of the Botswana Meat Commission broken up. They identified the lack of jobs and recreation for young people as major problems, because the alternative, they said, was alcohol consumption and subsequent unprotected sex leading to HIV infections.

HIV/AIDS: Some Progress

¶14. (U) Ambassador Huggins stopped at Tebelopele Voluntary Counseling and Testing Center, where director and counselors stated that testing had increased from an average of 60 persons per month last year to over 300 per month this year. For this, the director credited the effective rollout of ARV therapy. At dinner with Peace Corps volunteers that evening, the Ambassador expressed his appreciation for their path-breaking work in combating HIV/AIDS in the district through community organization and awareness-raising. On their part, the Peace Corps Volunteers related some success stories but also noted the often inflexible and anti-innovative nature of the Botswana bureaucratic structures with which they have to work.

Modernizing, Collaborating. . .

¶15. (U) Early the next morning, Ambassador Huggins and EmbOffs visited the San/Basarwa resettlement village of New Xade, established in 2002, located on the edge of the CKGR, seventy miles away on a sand and gravel road away from the Trans Kalahari Highway, without telephone service. Permaculture Trust extension workers had ensured communication. We were escorted by the District Commissioner and the RAD officer. The latter pointed proudly to some livestock as we neared the village: the GOB had provided these to the Basarwa.

¶16. (U) The village chief, Kgosi Lobatse Beslag, greeted EmbOffs. The Village Development Committee, councilors, District Commissioner and the RAD official joined our meeting held in the chief's office. The discussion took place in Setswana and was translated. A verbal list of concerns was recited: the first item mentioned was that New Xade has insufficient accommodation for civil servants. A storehouse for the vegetables grown on the Permaculture garden was required, as were recreational facilities for youth.

¶17. (U) Ambassador Huggins asked how people were faring

after the relocation. The answer provided by the chief was that they were much better off. A bright young councilor, James Kilo, who took the lead in the discussion, echoed this opinion, but he also asked for support for training and buildings. But people were much better off, in his opinion, living in New Xade.

118. (U) Despite rephrasing of the question--whether people really wanted to be in New Xade--the standard response, no doubt also influenced by the presence of the district officials, was that everything was fine. When we asked about ecotourism, we were told that a plot had been allocated for such a venture, but GOB funds had run out to translate it into reality. When we asked about plans for telephony, we were told that connectivity by telephone was in the village development plan, but much depended on the government, and it might and might not happen in 2007 and 2008. When we asked how people make a living, there was some evasion, but eventually the answers indicated that

people rely on government handouts. It became clear that everything, more or less, depended on the government. When asked about craft skills and income-generation, we were told that the distance and the lack of linkages for marketing were major hurdles.

. . . and Resisting

119. (U) Only at the end of the meeting, one of the older councilors ventured to answer the Ambassador's question: people are not happy. While many people were resigned to the relocation by now, many also went back to the CKGR. People mourn for their way of life, and regret that their children are not with them, but at school. Another grievance was that the Game and Wildlife Department prohibits New Xade residents who want to visit their relatives on the other side of the CKGR from traveling through the reserve; they have to go around. And only some, not all, received livestock.

120. (U) Kgosi Beslag decided, at that point, that the discussion had been sufficiently extensive. When the Ambassador asked about a solution, the chief reiterated the GOB line: put San/Basarwa children in hostels for their education and their own good, and bank on the next generation. In any case, he continued, hunting and gathering was a miserable and doomed way of life. You cannot stop progress. He suggested we visit the new village clinic next.

Potemkin Village?

121. (U) The New Xade clinic is an impressive building, dating from 2003. With a staff of 3, with a senior nurse-matron who arrived two months ago, the facility has beds, drugs, and supplies, but, at 10:00 in the morning looked eerily unused. We were told patients preferred to still go to the old clinic. Beds without linen attested to the truth of this. We next viewed two of the houses built by Permaculture Trust: one-room cinderblocks, on a plot large enough to cultivate a vegetable garden, looking comfortable. We were told who lived in one house; when we asked who lived in the adjacent one, we were told, "Oh, he has gone back to the CKGR." Our tour concluded with Ambassador Huggins greeting the assembled villagers in the central meeting place, and so we departed New Xade.

122. (SBU) The GOB is not likely to change its position on the CKGR. In a subsequent meeting between Ambassador Huggins and the GOB's Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr. Ernest Mpofu, the Ambassador related his impressions gained during his visit to Ghanzi District. He made the point that dialogue is the way forward, and the situation of the San/Basarwa should be reconsidered. The PermSec dismissed all such suggestions and was averse to the argument that the people are losing their culture. He viewed the plight of the San/Basarwa as no different from other ethnic minorities in the country, and he put forward again the GOB assimilationist line. His response to the arguments presented by Roy Sesana was: "Sesana is uneducated." He advised the Ambassador to discuss the question with relevant GOB ministry officials and hear the "true" version of events. He stated that New Xade as a location was chosen by the San/Basarwa themselves, attracted there by the GOB's provision of water. Ambassador Huggins's suggestions that the GOB reconsider its approach to how government deals with San/Basarwa and the issue of their cultural heritage was met with thinly veiled scorn. "We were like that

ourselves," said Mr. Mpofu, "when I was young; running after animals. But I sit here, talking to you, in your language, because I received an education."

Comment

123. (U) This was a long-planned visit to the west of the country, with prime objective being to gain first-hand impressions of the results of the GOB's policy of San/Basarwa populations out of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve during 2002/3. While it is probably the case that two-three years on since the move, the greatest trauma is past, it is also clear that people have been dumped in economically absolutely unviable situations without forethought, and without follow-up support. The lack of imagination displayed on the part of the GOB is breathtaking. The GOB views New Xade as similar to many sites of rural poverty, deserving no

special treatment. But the special tragedy of New Xade's dependent population is that it could have been avoided.

HUGGINS

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